

Source: Dictionary of Spirituality

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D. CHARACTERISTIC NOTE OF THE CARTHUSIAN SPIRIT.

—With good reason, many authors have affirmed that the Carthusian order was founded on penance, poverty, humility, obedience ... These virtues are indeed the obligatory and necessary basis of the life of the Carthusian, as of all religious life; but it is the spirit of virginity and simplicity which dominates, directs, and crowns all his life and is its main characteristic.

a. Spirit of virginity. —We give here the term spiritual virginity the meaning of intimate union with God and separation from all that can distract from him. This term, which may seem new, expresses something old like Christianity, which the Fathers and Doctors of the Church called "castitas, *virginitas mentis*" and which Cassian called "*puritas cordis*".

The expression, in the form of "*virginitas mentis*", is found among the Fathers of the Church who used it in the sense of "integrity of the faith informed by charity" (S. Augustine, In Joan., tract. 13, cp. 3, v. 22-29; Serm. 341, cp. 4; Origen, In Lev., hom. 12; S. Jérôme, In Matt., 25, v. 1 and sv.). For St. Thomas, who calls it "spiritual chastity", it is the virtue by which man finds pleasure in spiritual union with God (2a 2ae, q. 151, a. 2, c). One of Dionysius the Carthusian's treatises (*De laudabili vita virginum*, t. 38) is in part devoted to describing the obligations, the prerogatives and the spiritual fruits of this "*virginitas mentis*" which must shine with a very particular brilliance in those who have vowed forever the other virginity "*virginitas corporis*" (O. c., p. 172 A, D'; 174 A, sv. —Cf. also of Denys the Carthusian, In 2 ad Cor., c. 2, and on spiritual virginity considered as the indispensable complement of the virginity of the body, which is already the teaching of S. Paul, Athénagore, Legat. pro christian., n° 3; Hermas. Past., l. 2, Mand. 4, n° 4; S. Jean Chrysostome, In Hebr., Hom. 28; Fleury, Moeurs des Chrétiens, n° 26, etc.).

We can still identify spiritual virginity with the "*puritas cordis*" which is so often mentioned in the works of Cassian and which holds such a large place in monastic asceticism, in particular in the spiritual writings of Dionysius Rickel. The latter describes it thus in his

Cordiale sive praecordiale: "Purity of heart is like formal perfection and the intrinsic end [as opposed to the 'objective end, which is God'] which allows the soul to unite and to adhere to God, to find in Him, very immense and eternal, his rest and his contentment, separated from everything and fixed in the One" (vol. 40, p. 450 A ').

The "*puritas cordis*" of Cassian and the "*virginitas mentis*" of the Fathers of the Church are basically only two different expressions to designate one and the same thing composed of two correlative elements: union with God and detachment from the created. Purity of heart emphasizes above all the negative element, detachment; virginity brings out more the positive element, union with God. This is the main reason why we preferred the expression spiritual virginity. It also seemed richer to us, because of the idea of fullness and integrity that it spontaneously includes and evokes. Finally, since it is mainly a question here of characterizing a spirit and not a spiritual state, we preferred the expression: spirit of virginity as the most suitable for synthesizing what is commonly called: spirit of simplicity, spirit of love, spirit of union with God, as also: spirit of detachment or - according to the expression dear to Dom Le Masson - spirit of solitude.

Thus defined, the spirit of virginity is eminently suited to the contemplative (Cassian, Col. 10, cp. 6).

D. Blomevanna underlines the link which links the Carthusians on this point to the Desert Fathers: "Like the ancient monks of Egypt," he writes, [the first Carthusians] indulged in silence, reading, prayer, purity of heart and contemplation ..." (PL., 152, 288 A). Purity of heart is aptly named here immediately before contemplation, since it is primarily to her that the vision of God has been promised: "*Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt.*"

It is enough to reread, after the letter of Saint Bruno to Raoul Le Verd, the last chapter *De commendatione solitariae vitae* of the Customs of Guigues 1st, the *De quadripertito exercitio cellae* of Adam Scot, some treatises of Denys of Rickel and finally the chapter *De spiritu cartusiensis instituti* of the *Disciplina* of Dom Le Masson (lib. 1, cp. 4; especially nos. 14-34), to realize that the Carthusians remained faithful to this spirit of virginity. It is it, who wants everything, in Chartreuse, to be ordered to intimate prayer, to the union of God lived inwardly in a way that is both quite simple and almost

uninterrupted. It is again it which leads the Carthusian to beware of any morally avoidable contact with the world, of any unnecessary (intra-claustral) relationship with his brothers; to live as far as possible from creation; to finally forget himself, so that his heart, detached from all, free from all, may adhere only to God.

The spirit of virginity does not go without the spirit of simplicity.

b. Spirit of simplicity. "God is a virgin because he is simple." If souls were simpler, they would also be more virgin. The two things are, so to speak, inseparable, as they are in God. Therefore, the spirit of virginity necessarily presupposes the spirit of simplicity, the main object of which is to "reduce everything to the One, who is God" (Saint Jeanne de Chantal).

To acquire this virginity, there is nothing better than to imitate divine simplicity. By the simplicity which he enjoys as a pure act, God is essentially distinct and free from all creation. Moreover, his "ad extra" operations, his outer life as a kind of creator and orderer of everything, do not make him lose an atom of his Trinitarian life, which could be called his inner life. This is not all, this simplicity of an orderly nature brings with it a corresponding simplicity of an intellectual and affective order, which the soul that wants to become a virgin can and must imitate:

—Simplicity of divine intelligence that makes God have only one idea to represent all things. This idea is none other than his very simple essence by which he knows himself and knows all that is created.

—Simplicity of wills, which cannot be multiplied in God either: the act of will by which God loves himself, and wants to be what he is, contains eminently all his other wills, the term of which cannot be than an imitation, a participation of his goodness.

To the extent that a soul will see everything in God and love everything in him, to the same extent it will become simple and virgin.

Spiritual virginity is thus at the end of a double intellectual and affective simplification which can easily be reduced to the triple solitude of the mind, heart, and soul, at length described by D. Le Masson in the Discipline, lib. 1, cp. 4, sec. 1, and which could be summed up thus: when one loves God, when one loves

Jesus Christ, one thinks only of Him, and everything is there; all, not only the detachment of creatures, but still and above all self-forgetfulness, without which there is no loneliness, no inner simplicity, no virginity of mind.

The spirit of loneliness is thus easily reduced to this spirit of inner simplification. The same can be said of silence. It is quite certain, in fact, that the Carthusian silence could in no way be limited to speaking only as much as is necessary; it must become the state of a soul in love with God, to whom the world and all that passes "say nothing more," who no longer understands but God, but who finds him everywhere, and to whom everything speaks of Him. This silence, this loneliness imitates silence and divine loneliness incomparably better than the absence of words or complete isolation, because in God there is a Word, and there is a society of three Persons. What an ideal mixture of solitary life and common life, offered to the contemplation and imitation of the Carthusians!

But the spirit of simplicity is not only necessary to the Carthusian to attain the virginity of the mind and heart, as he must also preside over the organization and every detail of his external life. From this point of view, simplicity is the form in which virginity enters into composition with the realities of life; its role is to ensure harmony between the all-spiritual tendencies of virginity and the human, often material, conditions of existence.

In the practical field, the spirit of simplicity will therefore rule out all that is complication, uselessness; anything that is fictitious and of pure convention or staging; all that is extraordinary and exaggerated. There will be in the life of the Carthusian an element of unity and measure, balance and harmony, sincerity and righteousness, and so on. It will often take the form of common sense and wise rusticity that suits the inhabitant of the desert.

From the above, one can realize how much it would be to materialize the things that are limited to saying the "Carthusian simplicity" that it must go to rusticity. That would be to say of the scale of Jacob's vision, that she went to earth! She touched it well from below, but at the other end it went up to the sky. So, it is with the simplicity of the Carthusian: she goes from rusticity to spiritual virginity, informing all the acts of her outer and inner life.

Simplicity, it is seen, is not something accidental for the sons of S. Bruno, as would be a mere family tradition based on the example or arbitrary will of the founder. It is based on the unity of the end which belongs to the very essence of their exclusively contemplative life: «contemplativa vero (vita), simplex est, ad solum videndum principium anhelat, videlicet ipsum qui ait: Ego sum Principium, qui et loquor vobis» (S. Grég., In Ezech., lib.2, Hom. 22a). Such a simple life in terms of purpose requires a corresponding simplicity in means.

This is why D. Le Masson makes simplicity an essential part of the spirit of his order: "Inner and outer simplicity is (again), he writes (Direction ... p. X), one (another)) an essential part of the spirit of our institute ...: "The Couteulx, even better, wants it to be not only a part, but the whole of its spirit; "This spirit of simplicity, what is the essence of our profession," reads a letter written by him in 1702 and sent in 1704 to Dom Innocent's successor.

c. Practical consequence of simplicity: The spirit of erasure. —The Carthusians have always taken care to beware of a certain spirit which would consist in wanting to surpass others in austerity.

So that this spirit of rivalry could not enter Chartreuse, St. Bruno and after him Guigues I prudently ruled that no one would stand alone in anything, and would not practice, without the permission of the prior, other austerities than those which are of common use.

Speaking of the Carthusian spirit, D. Le Masson has shown very well how all the uses of the order only tend to keep the Carthusians hidden "not only in the eyes of the world, which does not see them, but even in the eyes each other":

"He (the Lord) wants these words of the Psalmist to be fulfilled in us to the letter: All the glory of this daughter of the King (he speaks of holy souls) comes from within." It is in that heart which must animate the exterior, and which appears only in the eyes of God: for he is the only one who knows the depths of the hearts; and it is for this reason that our first Fathers outlawed from among themselves all that feels singularity and taught us to flee from it as something contrary to the spirit of our Institute.

"This is why we find beautiful testimonies of words and examples in the first Rules of the Order, collected and composed by our R. Father Guigues, where not only do

we defend everything that would exceed the Rule, and 'would be undertaken arbitrarily, but even we reduce to the limits of common use things which might be believed to be excepted. There is a remarkable example of this in chapter 54 where it is spoken of the reliefs in recreation and food which are to be given to the Brethren on the appointed days which were ordained four times a year at that time. It is said, therefore, that in the event that some Brother is not bled, he does not allow himself to receive the same reliefs as the others, and if he makes it difficult, as if to say that he does not need it., the Latin word carries *compellitur*, it means that one is forced to do like the others.

"In one place it is said that the Brethren must return the dish of their food to the bursar, for fear," says the text, "that someone will undertake to make some singular abstinence which is not permitted to him." This is enough to let you know the spirit of the Order with regard to singularities ..." (Direction and topics of meditations ... pp. VI and VII.)

One use, in particular, shows how much one wants, in Chartreuse, to close all avenues to self-love: it is to not put on the grave of the deceased religious (exception made for the Generals), anything other than a wooden cross, without a name. It is enough that the one whose body rests there is known to God, since he lived only for Him. Of the austerities which he has added to the rule, and practiced with the permission of his superiors, the heavenly favors which he has received from God in return for his faithfulness, nothing will be published, not even within the monastery. The most that will be done if he died after an edifying life, or even with a reputation for holiness, will be to add the words "laudabiliter vixit" to the ordinary formula which, in addition to the date of his death, indicates the charges filled in the order by the deceased religious. There are no exceptions, and even so they are exceedingly rare, only for a few priors of Chartreuse, general ministers of order. The general chapter which followed the death of some of them added three or four lines of praise. They did not always even bother to compose new formulas. For RRs. PP. Dom Juste Perrot (1643) and Dom Innocent le Masson (1703) they were content to repeat the one composed by the Definitors of 1633 for RP Dom Bruno d'Affringues: "habens per totum Ordinem, cui sapienter, mansuete, benigne et vere paterne (tot) annis præfuit, triplicem monachatum, etc....". The eulogy of R. P. Dom Jean Pégon, composed by the Definitory of 1676, is one

of the few that comes out of the usual sobriety; still, it fits entirely in a single sentence of 7 lines.

For the same reason, a good number of Carthusian authors have published their writings under the veil of anonymity. It is only in our time that we discover that famous works, like the *Scale of the Cloister*, the *De Quadripertito exercitio cellae*, etc. ... attributed to S. Bernard or to others, actually had such and such a son of Saint Bruno for author.

From there again the refusal opposed to the popes by the priors of Chartreuse to accept the dignity of abbot or the cardinal's scarlet. This was offered in vain to the Generals Dom Jean Birelle († 1361), Dom Elizaire de Grimoard de Grisac († 1367), Dom Guillaume Raynaldi († 1402), and Dom François Maresme († 1463); to the prior of the Charterhouse of Florence, Dom Nicolas de Cortone († 1459).

It is this same spirit of self-effacement that prompts the order not to be concerned with having its saints canonized. Most of those who have been, owe it above all to foreign initiatives. The approval of the cult of Saint Bruno, which the Carthusians did not ask the sovereign pontiff for until 413 years after the death of their founder, only cost them an audience with Pope Leo X. The Carthusian petition, presented in the name of the general chapter by the cardinal of Pavia, protector of the order, and the four priors of the Carthusian monks of Bologna, Mantua, Naples, and Rome, was granted forthwith; and by an "oraculum vivae vocis", the pope allowed the order, which then numbered more than 200 houses, to celebrate each year the solemnity of Blessed Bruno, and also to remember him every day in the Office. In 1622, at the request of the Attorney General of the Carthusians, the Sacred Congregation of Rites decreed that the office and mass of Saint Bruno would take place in the Roman liturgy under the semi-double rite, and that the faithful could celebrate his feast on October 6 (Decree confirmed by Gregory XV on February 17, 1623). Finally, on March 14, 1674, at the request of the Queen of Spain, Pope Clement X raised the feast to a double rite and made it compulsory throughout the Church.

This spirit of self-effacement has more than once gone so far as to prohibit the dead from working miracles.

Under the priorate of R. P. D. Jancelin (1180-1223), a religious who died in the Grande-Chartreuse multiplied

the wonders to the point that his tomb threatened to become a place of pilgrimage. The Reverend Father went to the cemetery and forbade the deceased to perform miracles. They stopped immediately. This obedient death that the chronicler of the Grande-Chartreuse does not name, would be the immediate predecessor of Dom Jancelin, the RP Dom Guigues II, nicknamed L'Angélique (Cf. *Le Couteulx, Ann.*, T. I, p. 131).

Later, to put an end to the competition of the faithful who flocked to the tomb of a lay brother, Blessed William of Fenoglio († 1200), his body was transferred from the place too accessible to the public where he had been buried, in the interior cemetery of the Chartreuse.

Likewise, when the miracles obtained at the tomb of Blessed Dom Peter Petroni attracted a huge crowd of faithful there, the prior with the community went to the tomb and ordered the deceased to stop performing miracles "for fear," he said in addressing the deceased, may human celebrity not disturb in us the exercise of the Carthusian discipline that you so loved" (Cf. *Ephemerides*, t. 11, p. 265).

With such a spirit, we understand the remark of Dom Pierre Dorland, taken up by Benedict XIV, according to which the Carthusian Order prefers to make saints than to manifest them to the world.

d. A traditional fruit of spiritual virginity: joy. —Spiritual joy was like a watchword given by Pope Urban II to the first companions of S. Bruno shortly after their return to the Chartreuse du Dauphiné. Here is an extract from this first pontifical document addressed to the Carthusians, and kept by Tutini in the *Storia della Sacra Religione Certosina*, p. 12:

"Urban Bishop, servant of the servants of God, to his dear Sons Bruno, Landuin and other brothers, greetings and apostolic blessings. It is written: Joy and gladness are his companions; they dwell with him in his tent; we find in him thanksgiving and songs of praise. You, therefore very dear [Sons], whom the Lord has called to live in the place he has prepared for you on the mountain of Chartreuse, in the diocese of Grenoble, live there filled with joy and cheerfulness by the contemplation of heavenly things, to be able without interruption to hold your hearts lifted towards God, and

to enjoy the Lord ... Given to Benevento, the year 1091. Indic. XIV”.

We can say that the Carthusians, starting with their founder, were faithful to carry out this program. Saint Bruno was joyful and understood that all those on whom he had some influence were also: we find the testimony of this in the 149th title collected by the rolliger in the monastery of Sainte-Marie de Pontlevoi (diocese of Blois): “Esse suos laetos, laetus and ipse cupit”; but above all in the funeral eulogy traced by Blessed Lanuin and the sons that St. Bruno left in Calabria: “Semper erat festo vultu”. As for the desire that Saint Bruno had to see his family as joyous as him, we have proof of this in the letter he wrote on the end of his life to the Carthusian monks of the Dauphiné to pour out his joy with them and exhort them to joy. (Life of S. Bruno, 1898, p. 437-438 and PL., 152, 418).

Dom Jean-Juste Lansperge († 1532) wanted his religious to be joyful, and joy to appear on their faces. He wrote to a young religious: “Maturum te exhibeas; vultum tamen floridum, amicabilem atque serenum ad omnes habeas” (Letter 10. Op. omn., t. 4, p. 107). Outside the cell, in community, he recommends avoiding being too expansive, but in the cell, he advises to practice joyfully through holy hymns: “ In cella ac solitudine expedit eremicolam ad spiritualem se laetitiam exercere... dcirco etiam spiritualibus canticis hymnisque et psalmis, pro recreatione ac animi devotione in solitudine utibonum est...” (ibid., p. 533).

This joy has often struck foreigners who visit the Carthusians:

“What I will never forget,” wrote Ducis after his visit to the Grande Chartreuse in October 1785, “is the celestial contentment which is visibly painted on the faces of these religious. The world does not have the idea of this peace; it is another land, another nature. We feel it, we do not define it, this peace that wins you. I have seen the laughter and ingenuity of childhood on the lips of the old man, the seriousness and the recollection of the soul in the features of youth ...” (Cf. La Grande Chartreuse par un chartreux, Grenoble, 1882, p. 427).

This is what also struck D. Martène when he came to the Grande Chartreuse on August 15, 1708: “What is most admirable,” he says, is that the horror of such a vast solitude does not take away the joy of the religious who inhabit it” (Voyage littéraire ..., Paris, 1717, p. 251).

—The author of La Grande Chartreuse par un Chartreux, after having reported these two testimonies, adds this explanation: “The Carthusians have always been enemies of a certain stiffness, some form of control, which has nothing in common with this simplicity which is the true spirit of S. Bruno”. Op. Cit., P. 428.